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180649Z Mar 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001183

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/18/2015

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SUBJECT: LY PRESIDENT WANG JOINS KMT CHAIRMAN RACE

REF: A. TAIPEI 00632

1B. TAIPEI 00997

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: Legislative Yuan (LY) President Wang Jin-pyng declared his candidacy for the KMT Chairman race on March 17. Wang's long-expected announcement came a day after the KMT formally decided to postpone the election date from May 28 to July 16. Wang's opponent, Taipei City Mayor Ma Ying-jeou, charged that the change was devised to benefit Wang. Wang denied these allegation to AIT and accused Ma of spreading rumors. KMT insiders have hinted that Lien Chan prefers Wang to Ma, and they say that Lien approved the delay both to help Wang and to enable Lien to visit Beijing in July as KMT Chairman. End Summary.

Happy Birthday, Mr. President  
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12. (SBU) Legislative Yuan (LY) President and KMT Vice Chairman Wang Jin-pyng declared his candidacy for the KMT Chairman race at a press conference on March 17, his sixty-fourth birthday. In his long-expected announcement, Wang said that he wanted to be KMT Chairman in order to preserve the Republic of China (ROC); to facilitate KMT organizational reform; to unify the Pan-Blue alliance; and to promote cross-Straits exchanges based on the "1992 Consensus" (the so-called "one China, different interpretations" formula espoused by the KMT). Wang told the crowd that the only hope for a Pan-Blue Presidency in 2008 is if the KMT, People First Party (PFP), and New Party unify behind a single candidate. Wang said that he is best positioned to facilitate moves toward a merger of KMT and PFP.

Suspicious of Conspiracy  
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13. (C) Wang's press conference came a day after the KMT Central Standing Committee (CSC), the party's highest decision making body, decided that the party would hold the chairman election on July 16, instead of the originally scheduled May 28 date. According to the newly approved schedule, the KMT will publish details of the election on May 16, register candidates between May 25 and June 8, and release the names of the candidates between July 4 and July

18. Ma supporters resisted these changes, charging that the delay was devised by Chairman Lien Chan to give Wang more time to mobilize supporters in Southern Taiwan. The Ma and Wang camps are also locked in a dispute over a proposal to lift a party rule that prohibits party members who have not paid their membership fees from voting in the chairman election. Many Ma supporters charge that Wang is planning to use his influence over local grass-roots organizations to pay otherwise inactive KMT members to vote for Wang. Most KMT officials, however, believe that given the demographic, especially ethnic, structure of active KMT members, Ma will win in a fair fight.

14. (C) Despite his public pledge that the chairman election will not be a personal battle between Ma and himself and that he will strive for Wang-Ma cooperation for the sake of party unity, Wang told AIT privately that the KMT is doomed if Ma wins the chairmanship. Wang dismissed the contention that Ma had a better track record on reform, proclaiming that the reforms that he had brought to the LY were better than those in the Taipei City administration under Ma. Wang denied that he or his supporters are attempting to tamper with the election rules in order to give himself the advantage, and he accused Ma of spreading such rumors. Wang acknowledged to AIT that if the election were held today, Ma would win. However, in a few more months, Wang said he was confident that his organizational skills would tip the balance in his favor. Wang dismissed media reports that he and Ma talk regularly in order to maintain good relations. Wang said flatly, "we do not talk."

"Layers of Truth"  
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15. (C) KMT Spokesperson Cheng Li-wen told AIT on March 16

that there was actually a specific, non election-related reason for the postponement of the chairman election. Cheng said that Lien Chan wants to lead a delegation to Beijing in July to discuss cross-Strait relations, and that he wants to go as KMT Chairman. KMT/New Party Legislator Joanna Lei (Chien) confirmed to AIT that Lien's proposed PRC visit was one reason for the election delay. Lei told AIT that New Party Chairman Yok Mu-Ming has been laying the groundwork for Lien's proposed visit and that it was Yok who urged Lien to delay the chairman election. Lei, however, pointed out that there are always "layers of truth" in politics, and that Lien's desire to slant the election in Wang's favor was also an instrumental factor. She said that there was a confluence of interests.

16. (C) In contrast to Taipei City Mayor Ma Ying-jeou's matter of fact "I'll give it a try" pronouncement to a small group of journalists on February 14, Wang organized a lively event in a Taipei Sheraton Hotel banquet hall with life-size photos, music, lights, and legions of supporters. In addition to Wang's wife, who rarely makes public appearances, and relatives from Kaohsiung, thirty KMT LY members flanked Wang on stage, while another thirty plus sat in the audience. In addition to KMT Legislators John Chiang Hsiao-yen (recently changed from Chang), Joanna Lei, and Lee Chuan-chiao, legislators from other parties, including PFP Legislator Chiu Yi and Nonpartisan Solidarity Union Yen Ching-piao, also attended. Lei told AIT that she attended to support the "democratic process." Chiang told AIT that he attended because Wang is the Legislative Speaker, and that he would attend a Ma event if Ma invited him.

Comment: Evening the Odds  
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17. (C) The energy and excitement that Wang's supporters brought to the banquet hall of the Sheraton Hotel is the direct result of Wang's superior interpersonal skills. During successive LY election campaigns, Wang traveled the island, attending weddings, funerals, grand openings, and groundbreakings. He also helped LY candidates by providing financial resources and rallying votes. Ma might be charismatic and telegenic, but in person, he is aloof and distance. In contrast, in ward boss fashion, Wang will drink, smoke, and play mahjong with his supporters. Despite Wang's organizational skills and close relationship with the professional politicians, Pan-Blue insiders continue to admit, and opinion polls show, that Ma is the preferred Pan-Blue presidential candidate for 2008. In order to be the candidate in 2008, however, most observers believe Ma must first win the chairmanship. Even before the start of the race, Ma supporters fear that Wang's skills at party organization will allow him to manipulate the rules to his advantage. These fears appear to be materializing, with the party's decision to postpone the election date likely to be the first shot in what will undoubtedly be a divisive, and less-than-transparent, election process.  
PAAL